

Men & Marriage in the 80's:
USER'S MANUAL

by
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Table of Contents

Introduction

I. *Gauging the Success of Your Marriage*

1. The First Night
2. The First Week
3. The First Month

II. *The Other Facts of Life*

1. The First Call/Visit From Your Mother
2. The First Call/Visit From Her Mother
3. The First Hint of Trouble
4. The Second Hint of Trouble
5. The First Hint of Second Thoughts
6. Learning to Claim Romans 8:28 As your Life Verse
7. Mining the Deeper Meanings of Galatians 2:20a
8. Why The Dog Is Man's Best Friend
9. Sex and a Few Good Jokes

III. *Now on the Serious Side*

INTRODUCTION

What do men want when they decide to get married? Why has marriage, in the wake of the revolutionary 60's and the hedonistic 70's and 80's, seen a resurgence and new popularity? Quite frankly I haven't got the slightest idea. But looking around I can readily see that my guess is at least as good as the next guy's. (Besides, how thorough can you be when you only have one day to write your book?)

So it is with a sense of awe and irreverence that I offer these brief thoughts on such an important and much misunderstood subject: A Man's Approach to Marriage in the 80's.

PART I: Gauging the Success of Your Marriage

1. The First Night

As a man there is a very heavy responsibility resting on your shoulders when it comes to the success of the "First Night." The fact that you're even reading this section is not a very good sign. I spoke with Dr. Ivan Irrallingsworth of the Fort Bragg Research Institute, who recently published a highly controversial treatise entitled Human Sexuality And Its Effect on the MX Missile Program. Dr. Irrallingsworth had nothing pertinent to say regarding the subject of the "First Night" but he did say, having reached the age of 95 years old, he is still looking forward to his.

It was therefore the consensus of my three most trusted research assistants, Fido DeCat and the Kaypro Twins, Foreightyfour and Ten (boy you should see Ten . . .), that the "First Night" is not all that it's cracked up to be. Without needlessly going into any graphic details, it needs to be noted that the key thought here should be: Consolidate Your Holdings & Wait For the Economy to Straighten Up Before Selling Out. "What does all of this mean?" you ask. Well, in literal terms it means, having now bought the farm you have to take into consideration that there is always more here than you first imagined and less than you may have at first hoped for. I know this is a difficult concept to grasp, but having just recently become a married person (or soon to be one) it can't be over stressed that what we're talking about here is another form of Reality. How does one describe colors to a blind person? Or, how does one describe a symphony to a deaf person? In just the same way what will be experienced here is just as foreign and confusing and nonsensical to the unmarried person as colors and music are to blind and deaf persons.

So how does one insure success on the "First Night"? It depends on how one defines "success." Let me quote one of my favorite

passages in a book I continually turn to in my married life:

Love: (1) strong affection for another arising out of kinship, personal ties, sexual desire, admiration, benevolence, or common interests; (2) warm attachment or enthusiasm; (3) an amorous episode; (4) a score of zero in tennis.

(*Webster's Dictionary for the Functionally Illiterate*, p. 681)

I read that sometimes late at night and ask myself, "What in the world has that got to do with anything?" Then I go make a peanut-butter and jelly sandwich and stay up all night watching old Twilight Zone reruns. It always makes me feel better after a long hard day at the office.

The point to all of this is that there will only be one "First Night" in your whole life. In the twenty-odd years of your existence, for some of you a third of your life-expectancy, this will be the one time, the only time, the first time that you will spend the night with someone and not have to be embarrassed about the footies on your baby-blue pajamas and matching blanket. What a wild night!

2. *The First Week*

For seven longs days and nights you have been man and wife. Quick! Ask yourself these important questions: What color eyes does my wife have? What is her favorite perfume? If I were to have an extended serious illness which one would she prefer that I have? Does she like wearing my underwear as much as I do hers? And finally, which one of us will have the tenacity to finish reading this stupid manual?

Seven days, one hundred and sixty-eight hours, ten thousand and eighty minutes, six hundred and four thousand and eight hundred seconds, one work-week and one weekend, three and one half weekends, one fourth of one month, one forty-eighth of one year, one four hundred and eightieth on ten years---all of these things mean one thing: time is

going by. Time is going by and you are still married. Don't laugh, some pretty surprising discoveries generally appear in the course of ones first week of married life. My mother used to say that it was, "he he he" before the wedding and, "ha ha ha" afterwards. When pressed for an explanation of the saying all she could say was, "yuk yuk yuk."

Oh yeah, "Gauging the success of your marriage": after one week are you still, (1) doing the dishes with her; (2) taking the phone off of the hook when you first get home; (3) following her from room to room like a lost puppy; (4) not eating; (5) sleeping through your "quiet time"; (6) locking the bathroom door?

LET'S SEE HOW YOU SCORED!: if you answered "yes" to all six questions than, celebrate---the honeymoon is not over! If you answered "no" to all six questions than, celebrate--- you're quickly getting the hang of things! If you answered "yes" to three of the questions than, celebrate---you're normal! If you answered "no" to three of the questions than immediately make an appointment with your doctor about psychiatric help---if you continue this pattern for longer than another week it could be terminal.

3. The First Month

What could be said about the First Month that wasn't said about the first week? That's a pretty good question. I'll have to ask someone about that that has gone through the experience and lived to talk about it. There are some who say that the first year is the major milestone in the life of II your time a newly married couple. I disagree and feel that the major milestone is the first month. I base this on the simple reason that I don't want to write twelve more little chapters to reach that milestone. 'Nuff said.

The month is a basic measurement of time that highly suited for the task of distinguishing the present status of ones marriage. There are several factors involved in this observation. The first is that in the course of the first month you will have been paid somewhere between one

and four times (that is if you have a normal job). With each pay period comes the discussion on how the greenbacks are to be spent. This is a great opportunity to gauge the myriad of spending/saving patterns and how well one can bolster or destroy a budget. It's like having your own little Capitol Hill in your living room (NOTE: it has been scientifically proven that there is a distinct relationship between ones Net Income and the Gross Stability of ones marriage)! Another factor is that in the course of the first month ones sleeping, eating, taking-out-the- garbage and coming-home-from-work patterns should have made themselves known and/or created the type of familial disturbances that we all grew up with. The first month will also establish the sexual patterns that will most likely haunt you for the rest of your life. If the "First Night" wasn't an eye-opener for those virile males that saw matrimony as a cure—all for the dreaded terminal guilt that is associated with a runaway production of hormones than the "First Month" should really get that ol' hormonal factory going. What am I trying to say? Another good question! (That's two already). What I think I am trying to say is that marriage is great, but it's a different kind of great than from the one most young males are under the impression that it is (If you forget everything else that has been written here don't forget to refrain from leaving your participle dangling).

Let's see how we did on our question for the First Month. After one month are you still, (1) doing the dishes with her; (2) taking the phone off of the hook when you first get home; (3) following her from room to room like a lost puppy; (4) not eating; (5) sleeping through your "quiet time"; (6) locking the bathroom door?

LET'S SEE HOW YOU SCORED!: do these questions sound just like the questions for the First Week? Well they are, but look at how they change after one small month. If you answered "yes" to all six questions than you'd better wake up to reality son---the honeymoon has been renamed vacation or retreat so save that stuff for then and get back to work. If you answered "no" to all six questions than you should loosen up a little bit, too much more of this kind of behavior and she'll start believing that you do know what you're doing. If you answered "yes" to three of the questions than, celebrate---you're normal! If you answered "no" to three of the questions than you need to file out an application for becoming a Marriage counselor.

PART II: The Other Facts of Life

1. The First Call/Visit From Your Mother

She carried you around in her for nine long months. She was probably the first one to hear you say your first nonsensical words. She suffered with you through the life and death struggles of potty-training and nightmares. And when you walk up to her today the first thing that she sees is the little boy that used to stumble around the backyard with his zipper undone. She insists on calling you by a name that no one's called you in at least one decade: Tommy, Jeffy, Jimmy, Johnny, Pauly, Joey. I really hate that last one (for some strange reason). And now this woman to whom you owe a good portion of your existence is set to invade your happy new home.

Will everything be in its proper place? Will she notice that you still don't clean out the lint from under your bed or that your wife isn't using bleach when she does the laundry? When was the last time you washed the car or fixed that whachmacallit that you tore out of it? She isn't being critical. She's just being . . . you know, motherly. So how does your wife feel about your mother coming over? How does she feel about the woman period?

The differences between the way you were raised and the way that your wife was raised will probably be most evident when discussing how your mother treats you. The gap in understanding will make itself known in your wife's inability to understand why your mother treats you "that way" and why you put up with it. Are there any secrets to elevating this problem? Perhaps one, move out of the state---well, at least out of shouting range.

There are three sure ways to hamstring a new marriage: (1) problems with money, (2) problems with the in-laws and (3) problems with the in-laws. Catch my drift? 'Nuff said.

2. The First Call/Visit of Her Mother

Then there's her mother. Does this have anything to do with the phrase, "absence makes the heart grow fonder and the more absent the more fonder." Dr. M.A.Thew, in his book Reasons For Not Getting Seriously—Married, cites among a list of one hundred and eighty-two major categories for avoiding matrimony the inevitable First Visit by one's mother-in-law. What Dr. Thew fears from this encounter is that . . .

. . . too early on in the relationship the mother-in-law may come to expect from the son-in-law the kind of relationship that she never had with her own son. But then Toby was somewhat of a goof-off and never went to Med. School or did any of the other reasonable/respectable things that I did. But taken as a whole, undue pressure found it's way through that misguided sense of wanting to care. But then . . .

Where were we? As you can see, Dr. Thew has some real problems and has nothing reasonable to say about dealing with mother's-in-law, but then neither do I. So what's a growing boy to do? Punt.

3. The First Hint of Trouble

What is the First Hint of Trouble in Marriage and Men in the 80's? If there is any pattern in this jungle of misinformation and misconceptions it is that the first hint of trouble has something to do with expectations one carried into the marriage. Expectations, you know serious things like, "I thought you liked eating pizza that has been kicked across the floor," or "what do you mean, 'actually I has hoping that you we're serious about having children, I hate children'!?" You know, you go in expecting one thing and come out getting another. Oh it doesn't have to be worse

than what you expected, "I was just hoping that she was kidding when she said that she was bald." Stuff like that. This is the stuff that you never bothered to talk about when you were dating.

So what's the key? Communicate! (i.e., buy lots of stationary and/or buy a note-board to hang on the refrigerator).

4. The Second Hint of Trouble

The Second Hint of Trouble generally has to do with that time when she finally realizes that you were serious when you said that you wanted to make a career out of being a "Crossing- guard" (i.e., Money!). As was noted earlier, there is a direct proportional equation between ones Net Income and the Amount of Gross tranquility one experiences at home. This is not to say that money can buy love, but it helps make the down payment.

So what's the key? Get a Real Job!

5. The First Hint of Second Thoughts

Nothing like a little Reality to make your day. Now comes the time when one begins to second guess whether one was in his/her right mind to have gotten married. At best this is a futile exercise designed simply to rob you of what little happiness you may already have. So shout up and count your blessing, you little twerp! (Your mother-in-law told me to say that).

6. Learning to Claim Romans 8:28 As Your Life Verse

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according

to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

I like this portion of this manual: getting down to business and trying to find out if the bible has anything relevant to say on the subject. As per usual, even if the bible has nothing relevant we can come up with something that's pretty close.

So what does Roman 8:28 have to do with marriage? It's kind of like having that one cigarette in that little glass bottle that someone gave you when you were trying to quit smoking, or that second parachute strapped on when jumped out that airplane at 10,000 feet, or more like that little blue blanket that you have folded in your nightstand and bring out whenever your wife goes away on business. Romans 8:28 is the promise that God can see you through anything, even this mess.

7. Mining the Deeper Meanings of Galatians 2:20a

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live . . .
(Galatians 2:20a)*

I really wish we had time to mine the deeper meanings of this verse. There is a lot of significance in the concept of sacrifice in connection with marriage but I'll have to save that for my next book, Does James Dobson Really Use Grecian Formula 409?

8. Why The Dog Is Man's Best Friend

I have often wondered that myself, what about this affinity between canine and male human being. Does this have any relevancy to marriage? Probably not, but I'll give it a good stab.

I think the underlying question here has to do with why we as males are willing to eagerly tolerate overweight scruffy smelly canines that have bad breath and bark in the middle of the night when a siren sings in the distance and crap all over the garage on the Fourth of July. And

yet we expect our females to be no less presentable or appealing than Christie Brinkley in the bikini issue of Sport Illustrated. I think we've got a serious inconsistency here.

Now some bright soul is bound to point out that the thing that dogs have got going for them is that they don't talk back. Okay you got me there, but . . . when we got married were we looking for someone to play fetch with or what? Okay so there is some value in that image of the dog as a man's silent faithful partner but even the densest dolt will eventually see that there are a myriad of things that a man needs for which a dog is ill-fitted. Catch my drift, bozo? 'Nuff said.

9. Sex And A Few Good Jokes

I didn't know whether to title this section "Sex and a few good Jokes" or "Sex and a few other good Jokes." The second title sounded too negative (now we don't want to be negative, do we?) Why is our culture so caught up with sex? What's the big deal? On the two extremes we have one spectrum that wants to deify the act to being something akin to knowing God and on the other end we have those that see it as no more meaningful a bodily function than passing gas. Obviously, if these are the two extremes than I must be somewhere in the middle (somewhere, like just this side of deifying it to knowing the bodily function of passing gas).

All seriousness aside, the role of humor and a good sexual relationship are not that distant from each other (especially when you consider the thought, "they do it too?"; there are just some couples that I cannot imagine as having a good . . . oh never mind). Jokes and Sex---women like humor especially when you direct at yourself. This shouldn't take much effort, especially when you consider that this woman knows you in all of your ridiculousness. If you don't have a good laugh at yourself every once in awhile she is bound to think that you seriously intended to do those stupid things. So, sex and jokes are a useful tool in relationship management and in disarming the poor young thing to the

ravages of your steamingly virile masculine ways (does that sound like Romance Novel material or what?). So, have at it. Just stay away from the "knock-knock" jokes (they tend to breed violence and not romance).

PART III: Now On the Serious Side

For some irrational reason I felt compelled to somehow validate the first two parts of this manual by including this last section. I've never quite learned to let sleeping dogs lie or to leave well enough alone. But if Wellenough wanted to be left alone than he wouldn't have subjected himself to the foolishness of this manual on marriage now would he.

Marriage is a very much misunderstood phenomenon of Living. But at least that's in keeping with the fact that Life itself is very much misunderstood. A wise man once wrote:

Life is full of pain and suffering. That'll never change. But the dread and fear of being alone and unloved should not have to be a part of it. Tragedy lies in wait for that one that foolishly sneaks through life avoiding the one, probably the only one, that really loves him for the person that he is.

— J.B., In Bad Faith (unpublished notes)

Men don't talk much about this side of existence; the part about being alone and needing---needing somebody else to fill up the emptiness of our existence. It's a sign of weakness, the wrong kind of vulnerability. Most women would welcome the revelation of your vulnerability. It's just another facet of being approachable and self-aware. But don't let it be known that you need them. This is true of most women. This is true of most people. But this is probably not true of the one that has said that she wants to spend her life with you.

. . . But the dread and fear of being alone and unloved should not have to be a part of it . .

Why marriage? Why do we want to get married? What roles do we foresee for ourselves and our mates in the future? Why marriage?

As one brother to another, as one friend to another I have to say that in the short time that I have been married I have learned so much about myself and my wife and about life itself that I could never learn from books or manuals. It's a scary step to be taken, full of unsureties and mysteries, which no one else can take for you. But the blessedness of the thing is that this is the one step that you start out being alone and emerge being one.

*It's a typical day for the man of steel
a little happy and little bit sad
That seems like a reasonable way to feel
for a man in a world gone mad*

*There's a baby that's bouncing on his daddy's knee
grinning like the world's his own
There's a Cadillac climbing a cold dark hill
to a grave with a fresh placed stone*

*And the man of steel has a gleam in his eye for
the innocent one
And the man of steel has a lump in his throat for
a loved one gone
And the man of steel has hope in his heart for anyone
who can see what's true between the two
and carry on.*

*He used to feel funny 'bout feeling sad
He saw it as a sign of weakness
Now he takes his portion of the good and bad
and he prays he can make a difference*

*'Cause there's a poor man begging
for a crust of bread
on a hard mean street downtown*

*And there's a rich woman sewing with golden thread
on the train of her wedding gown*

*And the man of steel has a tear in his eye for
the homeless one*

*And the man of steel has a lump in his throat for
the owner of love*

*And the man of steel has hope in his heart for anyone
who can see both sides and still decide to carry on.*

*And the man of steel has a lump in his throat for
a world gone wrong*

*And the man of steel has a gleam in his eye for
the one whose despair is gone*

*And the man of steel has hope in his heart
for anyone*

Who will sing a clear and truthful song

Who will hear a lie and still be strong

*Who can see both sides and still decide to carry on
to carry on.*

—Pat Terry, "The Man of Steel"